



# St Mary's Catholic School

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*where everyone can succeed*



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Dear Parents and Carers

I hope this letter finds you and your family safe and well.

As I outlined in my previous letter before the summer holidays, it is the government's expectation that all children will return to school full time in September. Over the summer break, we have been working through the detailed government guidance for the full reopening of schools, including updates to this guidance that have been published within the last week. This has enabled us to finalise our plans and update our Risk Assessment. The broad plan outlined below is fully in line with this guidance and we are confident that the measures outlined will ensure a safe return for everyone. Also, further to the detail outlined in this letter, later this week, Miss Lague, Assistant Headteacher or Mr McKeating, Assistant Headteacher will write to you, with specific information about the start of term for your child's year group.

We are very much looking forward to welcoming back our students next week, including welcoming our new Year 7 students. Our overriding concern, in all of our thinking, is the safety and well-being of our students and staff. Therefore, robust protective measures will continue to be put in place in school to ensure the health and safety of all members of the school community and to manage any potential risks effectively. With this in mind, the government guidance asks schools to reduce student movement and mixing and to maximise social distancing between those in school wherever possible, whilst also ensuring high quality teaching and learning within a broad and balanced curriculum.

## Zones and year group bubbles

- There will be a very significant reduction in student movement. We will do this by ensuring careful 'zoning' of the school to support social distancing and reduce mixing of students.
- Each year group will be based in a different wing/zone of the school for the vast majority of their lessons.
- All students will be in year group 'bubbles,' with Year 12 and 13 treated as one bubble. KS3 students will be kept in half year group bubbles for most of their lessons, whilst KS4/KS5 will be organised as year group bubbles for lessons, to ensure that students are able to continue to study their full range of option subjects. All of this is permissible and, indeed, anticipated, within the government guidance.
- These different bubbles of students will be kept separate from each other, as far as possible, within the school.
- There may be an occasion when students have to move out of their zone, for example for PE lessons, given the specialist facilities that will be needed for this subject, however this will be kept to a minimum and for the vast majority of lessons, students will remain in their zone of the school.
- Teachers will teach across year groups and move between different zones. Teachers will aim to maintain two metres distance from students at all times, including during lessons. There may be an occasion when this isn't possible and, in this case, teachers will minimise time spent within one metre of students.
- Due to the year group bubbles and zones, areas in the school where many different year groups would normally visit such as the Pastoral Offices, the Inclusion Suite and the Library will not be able to be organised as they normally would, given we must keep different year group bubbles separate. However, please be assured that all such support will still be in place for our students, these areas will simply be organised on a zone by zone basis, rather than in one venue.
- Within these bubbles, in their classrooms and around the school, students will be expected to maintain distance between each other as far as possible. We will continue to remind students about this regularly during tutor time and there is clear signage around the school to help with this too.

## Arrival at school

- There will be no change to the start time for students, given students arrive in a gradual flow anyway in the morning. Therefore, all students in Years 7-13 should continue to be on the school site every day for 8.40am.
- Students will be socially distanced as soon as they arrive on site. The year groups will be divided between the two different pathways from Benton Park Road and they will be further divided into 3 different entrances into the school. The specific

detail regarding the pathway/entrance to be used for your child's year group, as mentioned, will follow in a letter later this week.

- Students in each year group bubble will then have a specified yard in which to meet before school, separate from all other year groups. This yard will also be used for outdoor breaks and lunchtime. A separate inside venue has also been planned for each year group, in the event of inclement weather at any of these times.
- From this yard, all year group bubbles have a separate entry/exit point to the building.

### Breaks and Lunchtimes

- We will now stagger break times, with KS3 having an earlier break and KS4/5 a slightly later break time.
- As outlined above, students will go to their year group yard for break or to their designated inside venue for a wet break.
- Food will no longer be available at break time in the dining hall, given that it would be impossible to get 3 year groups bubbles separately through the dining hall in a 15 minute break time.
- Food will, of course, be available for students at lunchtime from the dining hall. There will be a reduced range of food available, compared to previous years, given that we need to get the 5 main school year groups through the dining hall/main hall in a timely manner, to ensure a thorough clean of all dining facilities between each bubble. There will still be a range of hot and cold choices.
- Students will have a timeslot for their lunch, so that we can keep year group bubbles separate. There will only ever be one year group at a time in the dining hall/main hall for lunch.
- We would encourage as many students as possible to bring a packed lunch to school, to support us with the above lunchtime routines.
- Sixth Form students will have a different arrangement and will not be using the dining hall for lunch. Mr McKeating will explain this in his letter.
- All parents will also receive additional information this week about the IPayImpact system, which will allow money to be added to students' accounts online. This will reduce the need for students to 'top up' in school.

### Uniform

- All Year 7 to 11 students must return to school in full school uniform in September.
- All Year 12 and Year 13 students must return to school in full Sixth Form dress code.
- All expectations re jewellery, hair style etc also remain the same.
- Please see previously distributed guidance regarding our uniform/dress code expectations.
- The government guidance encourages all schools to return to their usual uniform policies from September.
- This guidance also makes clear that uniforms do not need to be cleaned any more often than usual, nor do they need to be cleaned using methods which are different from normal.

### Equipment

- Students should bring their own equipment to school, as always, such as a pen, pencil, ruler etc. This is particularly important currently so that we can minimise the sharing of equipment between students.
- Some equipment and resources will be shared by the class teacher but these resources will be largely limited for use by only one year group bubble.
- Students should also have a school bag.
- Student lockers in the main school will not be available until further notice, given that most lockers are housed outside of zone areas and we cannot have students leaving their zone to visit their locker. Therefore, students will have to carry any equipment they bring to school throughout the day.

### Work in lessons and Homework

- Exercise books will be used in school and, for the majority of time, these books will remain in school (in a year group zone) and not taken home by students. This is to reduce the risk of transmission between school and home. Therefore, students should not have large numbers of exercise books or resources to carry around during the school day, as exercise books will be largely for classwork and remain in classrooms.
- Homework will be set regularly for all year groups, as normal, but instead of this being completed in student exercise books or homework booklets, it will largely be set and completed remotely, using Microsoft Forms (or for Sixth Form students, sometimes via email).
- For any students without IT access at home, as with during lockdown, a system will be put in place to ensure these students are also able to complete all homework.
- All classrooms have been reorganised in the school to maximise the space available and to ensure that all students are sitting side by side and facing the front, rather than facing each other. Of course, the vast majority of classrooms will only ever be used by one year group bubble of students.
- There will also be minimal student movement in the classroom, with students remaining in their seats, supported by excellent hand hygiene and two metre distancing of staff from students as far as possible.

- There are also subject specific considerations in certain subjects, such as PE, Drama, Music and other practical subjects. Overall, practical activities in any lessons will be limited, certainly in the first half-term, and there are restrictions regarding physical activity, singing, dancing etc. However, PE lessons will still take place and non-contact sports/activities will be possible.

### Toilets/Water Fountains

- All year group bubbles will have a separate toilet block assigned to them. Only one year group bubble will use each toilet block.
- All year groups will also have a water fountain for their bubble. Therefore, should students wish to use this, they should bring a water bottle to school for this purpose.
- To minimise how often students need to visit the water fountain, which will be shared by all students from the year group bubble, we would advise students to bring this bottle to school already filled.

### Travel to school and parent/carer access to school car park

- We would encourage students to walk or cycle to school and to avoid public transport if possible.
- If a student needs to use public transport, of course, national guidelines mean they should wear a face covering at all times on this transport.
- At the start of the new school year, we will continue to allow access to our school car park for parents/carers. However, parents/carers must remain in their cars at all times for health and safety reasons and, of course, should adhere to our normal protocols of driving with due care, not blocking the roads around the car park etc.
- However, we plan to monitor the carpark closely and it may be necessary to limit parental/carer access to the car park at certain times of the day, or even at all points throughout the day, if we feel health and safety is being compromised in any way. Therefore, we will be in touch with you, should there need to be any changes to this policy.

### Meetings with parents

- Given that we will need to limit the amount of adults that come into the school building, due to social distancing and health and safety protocols, we will initially be minimising the number of parental meetings that take place in the school building, with any meetings likely to take place via telephone or, potentially, remotely, rather than in person.
- Therefore, no parents should come to the school without a prior arranged appointment, unless it is an emergency, which should be very rare indeed.
- As always, parents will be able to contact relevant staff via telephone on the school number with any queries at all. Staff will get back to you in a timely manner.

### End of School day

- The school day will end at 2.55pm for students in Years 7 and 8, this is only 5 minutes earlier than usual for these year groups.
- The school day will end at 3.10pm for students in Years 9, 10 and 11, as normal.
- Year 12/13 students will leave school following their last lesson of the day. On most days this is likely to be either after Period 4 at 2.10pm, after Period 5 at 3.10pm or after Period 6 at 4.10pm.
- This staggered dismissal will help us to maintain social distancing as much as possible for students on the journey home.
- Again, we would recommend that, as far as possible, students walk or cycle home, rather than use public transport such as the metro. However, we fully understand that some students will still need to use public transport, given the distance they have to travel home.

### Face masks

- As you may be aware, on 26<sup>th</sup> August the government issued new guidance to schools in England which made the wearing of face masks mandatory in secondary schools in areas of the country which have high rates of transmission. In addition, schools in other areas of the country, such as St Mary's currently, were given the flexibility to introduce face masks, in those parts of the school where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain e.g. in communal areas such as corridors.
- This policy of wearing face masks in communal areas is already mandatory in all secondary schools in Scotland and Northern Ireland and, whilst it is not currently mandatory in all schools in England, many schools, both locally and nationally, are choosing to implement this. *Having carefully considered the latest guidance and the layout of our school building, we have decided that face masks will be worn by students and staff in communal indoor spaces such as corridors.* We feel this is a sensible approach at this time, to ensure an extra layer of protection for students and staff, given the guidance permits this, and to provide potentially increased confidence for students, parents and staff for the full reopening of the school.
- The government is very clear that face masks should not be worn in classrooms, as other measures are already in place in classrooms to support health and safety, as outlined. The guidance also explains that wearing face masks in a classroom

would have a negative impact on teaching and learning. Therefore, whilst students and staff will wear face masks in corridors and other indoor communal areas, they will not wear face masks in classrooms.

- We are very lucky to have a building design that supports us in keeping year group bubbles separate in different wings of the school, however, as with most schools, it will be very challenging to maintain social distancing in our corridors, as students and staff are moving to and from, and within, these bubbles/zones. Therefore, the wearing of face masks in communal areas, where social distancing may not be possible, will help us to further reduce the possibility of the transmission of COVID.
- Students will not have to wear face masks outside in the yards but they will have to wear a face mask when they enter the building and when walking to and from their zone. They will also wear face masks at lesson changeovers when moving between classrooms within their zone, as well as when walking to other areas of the school, for example, to the main hall.
- As soon as students are seated in a classroom and/or a hall or have reached their outdoor break or lunchtime yard, students will be able to remove their face mask. Students will also not wear face masks in the dining hall. Therefore, overall, students will only be wearing these face masks for a few minutes at a time.
- Staff will also wear face masks when in indoor communal areas with students, such as in school corridors.
- Students and staff will need to bring their own face mask to school. We hope this should be fine, given everyone will likely already have a face mask due to wearing these in shops, on public transport etc.
- Face masks used by students in school should be plain in design, with no patterns or logos and they should be an actual face mask rather than other types of face coverings such as scarfs. Students should also bring a small plastic bag with them, to keep the mask safely stored, in their blazer pocket or bag, when it is not being worn. Students will be given guidance regarding how to wear/take off a face mask safely.
- Of course, as with society more generally, a small number of staff and students may not be able to wear a face mask for medical reasons. If you feel that your child is in this medical exemption category, please contact Miss Lague (Years 7-11) or Mr McKeating (Years 12-13).
- As with all policies, we will review the policy of wearing face masks regularly and, if the government or public health guidance changes and/or the national or local situation changes, we will adapt accordingly.

### Cleaning

- Enhanced cleaning routines will continue throughout the school.
- Any resources that need to be shared between classes or bubbles, such as sports, art and science equipment, will be cleaned frequently and always between bubbles, or rotated to allow them to be left unused for an advised period.
- We continue to work closely with our Facilities Management company Robertsons, as well as the Cleaning Contractor, to ensure all support is in place.
- Additional cleaning of all surfaces, touch points etc will continue daily and cover every room/area of the school. At the end of each day, a thorough extra clean will be given to every area/room. The cleaners operate to an enhanced cleaning regime overseen by the service provider.

### Hand hygiene/respiratory hygiene

- Hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene will also be paramount with students and staff directed to wash hands very regularly, when entering/leaving the school, entering/leaving zone areas and entering/leaving the dining hall.
- There will also be further handwashing in zones throughout the day.
- Hand sanitiser will be available in all rooms and common areas for students and staff to continue the pre-closure handwashing procedures.
- There will also be tissues provided in all classrooms and an increased number of bins across the school to ensure the NHS message of 'catch it, bin it, kill it' is embedded.
- If possible, it would be ideal if students also brought a small bottle of their own hand sanitiser, and some tissues, to help support this process.

### Any students with COVID symptoms and/or returning from a country with quarantine restrictions

- Students with any COVID symptoms (i.e. a high temperature, a new continuous cough, a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste etc) should not come into school. Similarly, if a member of a student's family or someone they have recently been in close contact with has COVID symptoms, the student also should not come into school.
- Please inform your child's Head of Year immediately if he/she or a family member has COVID symptoms.
- We would then ask you, as the parent/carer, to book your child a COVID test as soon as possible. The results are usually received in less than 48 hours, often in 24 hours. If the test for your child is negative (or if it is a family member who has symptoms rather than your child, and they receive a negative test result) you should let the Head of Year know and your child will then be able to return to school.
- Should the test be positive, of course your child should remain at home and follow national public health guidance for self-isolation, when to seek medical support etc.

- If a student develops any of the symptoms whilst in school, they should notify a member of staff immediately. The student will be supported and remain separate from the other members of the school community until a parent/carer can collect them from school. We would appreciate if he/she could be collected as soon as possible.
- We will work with local health authorities in responding to any confirmed cases in the school community. The government has recently confirmed that schools should not make any decisions about wider student or staff isolations until they have received guidance from the relevant health authorities.
- Furthermore, if any student has returned recently from a country where quarantine restrictions are in place, they should, of course, not come into school until the period of quarantine is complete.

We understand that these changes to the organisation of the school in September will feel very different for students and staff but they are absolutely necessary to ensure the health and safety of all members of the school community and, despite the different routines and organisation, we will continue to ensure that all students are able to thrive and enjoy being at St Mary's. It will be fantastic to have all of our current students back in September, as we have missed them greatly over the last few months. It will also be wonderful to be able to welcome our new Year 7 students.

Finally, as mentioned in my earlier letter, to help ensure that students are well supported in settling back into school and these new routines, we will have a staggered start to the new term in September, with year groups returning to school on different days:

- Tuesday 8th September – our new Year 7s and new Year 12s will return
- Wednesday 9th September – our Year 11 and Year 13 students will return
- Thursday 10th September – our Year 8, Year 9 and Year 10 students will return

Thank you so much for your continued support. If you have any queries regarding any of this information, please do get in touch with your child's Head of Year in school.

Yours faithfully,



Miss Patterson  
Headteacher